Institutional Memories for Managers

John E. Cook

At the November 1992 George Wright Society meeting in Jacksonville, FL, an individual asked me about an old program of the National Park Service that dealt with research and natural area designation. Now, contrary to a few rumors and some outright beliefs, I was not a contemporary of Steve Mather and Horace Albright. Nor is my memory as brightly recollective as Mr. Albright's was. Hoping to get off the hook without jeopardizing my living legend reputation, I referred my interrogator to Bob Utley, a former NPS chief historian present along with Bill Brown and Dick Sellars, other worthies of his profession.

The question did get me thinking more deeply about Institutional Memories, which I had recently begun to ponder for this paper. After all, at some point the libraries curated in the minds of George Hartzog, Bob Utley, Bill Brown, Ned Danson, Art White, and others won't be around to regale us with the facts, flavor, and fission of the historic environments surrounding Hubbell Trading Post, Navajo National Monument, Canyon de Chelly, Jean Lafitte, the Old Santa Fe Trail Building housing the Southwest Region's headquarters, or the Southwest Region itself. There will come a time when new people have questions and no one will be around who remembers the **whole** answers. There will be a few facts proffered, a few basic figures, some book-learned recitations—but no flavor, no color. Many of our Paul Harveys have left us and we are losing "the rest of the story." We aren't encouraging replacements.

This leaves us one and only one ace in the hole, folks: well done administrative histories. Notice I said well done—not dry tomes of lifeless facts and figures but epistles breathing life as it was lived, history as it was made, and courses of direction as they were forged.

Question: What was the genesis of the National Park Service and the Southwest Parks and Monuments Association at an Indian trading post in the outlands of the country's largest reservation?

The answer is wrapped around the quirky gyrations of George Hartzog as he, Ned Danson, and Bob Utley prepared to appear before the parks subcommittee of the House of Representatives on June 21, 1965, when Hubbell Trading Post was at the crossroads of possibility as a national historic site. Danson and Utley assembled in Director Hartzog's office, where Hartzog questioned how the trading post would be interpreted. "I responded with a rather conventional approach of recreating a static exhibit, with period merchandise on the shelves and other features recalling the appearance of the various rooms in Don Lorenzo's time," Utley later recalled.

According to Utley, Hartzog erupted that he "would not countenance another goddamned dead embalmed historic site, that it must be a living trading post." Appalled, shocked, and stuck with all the committee hearing material geared toward the establishment of another museum-like historic site, Utley tried to talk Hartzog out of the living trading post idea. Where would they find an experienced trader? What about the Navajos' reluctance to appear before gawking tourists? But Hartzog had made up his mind, "and that, in emphatic and colorful language, was that." Moreover, Ned Danson gleefully agreed with him. "So we marched over to the hearings and George nailed us firmly to [the living trading post] approach in his testimony," Utley remembered.

Hubbell's administrative history records the following:

Rep. O'Brien: "I would like to ask one question. Throughout all the statements, including yours, you emphasize the uniqueness of this particular place. We are all aware, however, that there are other trading posts scattered around, some going to pot. Would it be the idea of the Department that this would be selected not only because it is a good layout and historical but as a sort of symbol of the trading post? We will not be having in the years ahead a whole string of former trading posts coming into being as historical sites?…"

Mr. Hartzog: "Sir, this is what we consider to be, after surveying all of them, the best existing operating trading post. We would hope in our management to maintain it as an operating trading post. The operating trading post is fast becoming a thing of the past. Our study of it indicates that within a relatively few years there will be no more of them because of the competition from supermarkets, improved modes of transportation, changing tastes and whatnot. So we believe that as an operating trading post this will be the only one."

The NPS Looks for an Operator for the Trading Post

The Director of the National Park Service, George Hartzog, wanted the Fred Harvey Company involved. They were big, they had the money to back up any commitment, and they had been dealing in Indian arts and crafts for decades.

Near the end of July, 1966, the head of the Fred Harvey Company's arts and crafts department arrived at Ganado to size up the trading post as a possible business venture. Dorothy Hubbell and John Cook were on hand to show him around and answer his questions.

During the man's survey of the trading post, it became clear to Mrs. Hubbell and Cook just what Fred Harvey had planned for the trading post. Fred Harvey would turn it into an arts and crafts outlet and purchasing point, the most prized pieces to be sent to their Grand Canyon store where they could command higher prices. As the Fred Harvey man disclosed some of their plans, Cook became

increasingly disappointed and thoughtful. The bullpen, the canned peaches and tomatoes, the bottles of soda pop, the wool, the piñon nuts—it would all become a memory. What the Fred Harvey Company had planned for the trading post would kill the atmosphere of a true trading post.

Deciding it was time for immediate and direct action, Cook drove to the National Park Service regional office in Santa Fe. With visions in his mind of Hubbell Trading Post filled with tourist trinkets—rubber tomahawks and tom-toms—Cook tackled Assistant Regional Director George Miller. He told Miller that what the Fred Harvey Company wanted to do would fail. The National Park Service could wind up with a "trading post" little different from the tourist shops along U.S. 66 (SEE LIVE RATTLESNAKES AND BUY REAL MOCCASINS). The place would be an embarrassment… .

If Fred Harvey wasn't the solution, did Cook have a better idea? Yes. They could try to get Southwest Parks and Monuments Association to take over the operation of the trading post. SPMA could continue to run the place as a genuine trading post. Cook knew an old-time trader. Maybe he could be talked into managing the store for SPMA.

George Miller considered Cook's ideas for a moment and then telephoned George Hartzog in Washington. He told Hartzog what Cook had in mind. Then Cook got on the line. He explained that the Fred Harvey Company, in spite of all their experience, were not going to be good for Hubbell Trading Post. SPMA, with the right man on the premises, could probably do a better job. He had to admit, however, that neither SPMA nor the trader he had in mind were yet aware of his plan.

A naturally audacious man, Hartzog told Cook to take the idea and run with it. And, Hartzog continued, if the arrangement turned out to be a success, Cook would earn everybody's thanks and congratulations. But if the plan should fail, Cook's career might "fail" at the same time… .

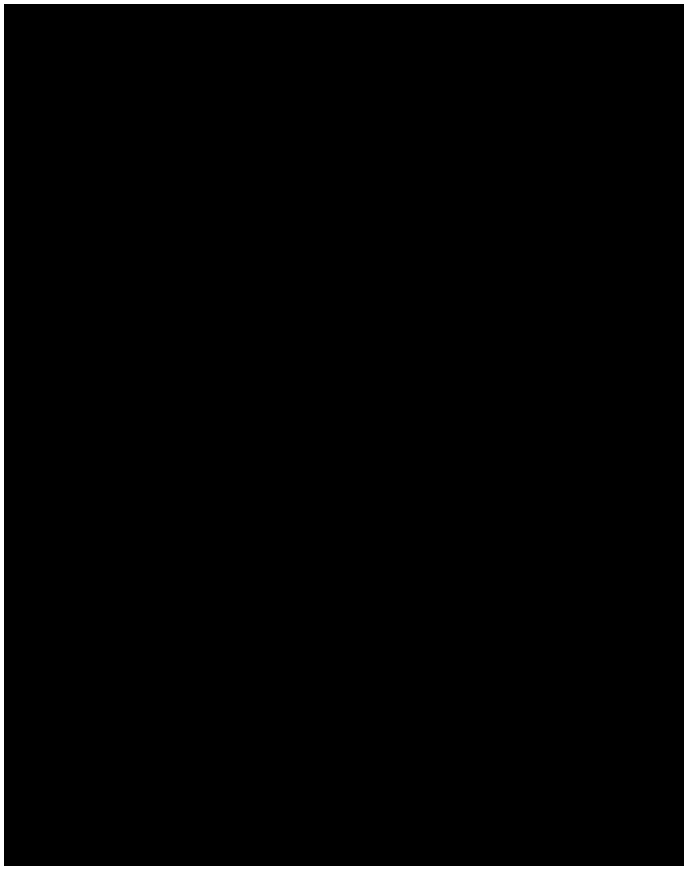
It takes about four hours to drive from Santa Fe to Ganado. John Cook had plenty of time to think about what he would do next.

Enter Southwest Parks and Monuments Association

What Cook did next was call his old friend Dr. Edward B. Danson of the Museum of Northern Arizona. The ubiquitous Ned Danson was not only Director of the Museum and a member of the National Park Service's Advisory Board, he was also on the Board of Directors of Southwest Parks and Monuments Association! Danson was delighted with the scheme and promised to throw his weight behind it.

The problem they faced was one of timing. Matters would have to be arranged so that there would be a simultaneous transfer of the site to the government of the United States and a transfer of the contents of the store to the operator of the trading post. The trader Cook had in mind for SPMA was a neighbor of his at Canyon de Chelly, Bill Young, who was then managing the Thunderbird Trading Post there… .

The Board of Directors of SPMA voted in favor of the partnership that exists today.



Hubbell Trading Post, Rug room, with trader Bill Young. Photo by Fred Mang, NPS.

All of this information exists today to be passed from one generation of managers and interpreters to the next generation, only because an administrative history was crafted while the subjects were still around and willing to share the whole story, not just static facts.

Question: Why do the Austins appear to have a monopoly in providing horseback tours at Navajo National Monument? Look to the monument's administrative history:

In visitor service, area Navajos played an important role that resulted from the non-contiguous nature of the park. The trip from the visitor center to either Betatakin or Keet Seel ruin crossed Navajo land. Eight miles distant, Keet Seel was easier to reach by horse than foot. In 1952, area Navajos began to make horses available for guided tours to Keet Seel. Pipeline Begishie, the patriarch of a local family, organized the trips. Many of the people in the area allowed their horses to be used—for a fee—and Begishie or one of

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the others close by guided the trips. The fee was ten dollars per day for the guide and five dollars for each horse. The animals they used were big and strong, one observer recalled, and the trips had real appeal for visitors.

The [1962 memorandum of agreement with the Navajo Nation] formalized the outfitting process at the monument, requiring more than a verbal agreement and possibly precipitating a change in the vendor. One summer in the early 1960s, Pipeline Begishie decided that the horse trips were more trouble than they were worth. Some accounts suggest that one of Begishie's neighbors, E. K. Austin, bullied him into a cessation of his activity. Into this vacuum stepped Austin, who claimed the land through which the trips had to pass on the way to Tsegi Point and Keet Seel as his own. Much of the exchange between Begishie and Austin occurred without the knowledge of park personnel. Yet Austin stepped forward and claimed the right to offer services to Keet Seel. In exchange for the right of passage across Navajo lands, the Park Service agreed to let the Austin family offer guided horse trips to the outlying section.

E. K. Austin related a different version of the transfer. He claimed to have taken pack trips to the ruins since the days of John Wetherill. In his view, Begishie was an interloper, crossing on Austin's land. The monument was located in the district of the Shonto Chapter, but Austin was enrolled in the Kayenta Chapter. He believed this accounted for Begishie's presence. The disagreement became serious in the early 1960s, and both Art White and his successor Jack Williams tried to mediate. They were unsuccessful, and both Austin and Begishie were called to Window Rock. There, Austin claimed, he was vindicated and offered the service that was rightly his.

Austin's privilege to offer horse trips was not exclusive, although he worked to make it a monopoly. As late as 1966, Jack Williams noted that Begishie's permit to carry people to Keet Seel was valid, but he would not do so as long as the Austins did. The transfer may have been done by force or by intimidation, but the result was the same. E. K. Austin had control of the horse trips to Keet Seel.

The Austin family conducts these trips to this day.

The permanent Institutional Memory is the well-written administrative history. Besides being important historically, it can be fun to read. I invite anyone to catch the spirits of the wind and water, the blue sky and red rock, and the spirits of people's past captured in the unorthodox administrative histories of the southwest parks and monuments. I guarantee a few smiles and a collection of chuckles. Ah, the grandeur of place and the merriment of life—what a legacy!

View of Hubbell Trading Post site. Photo by G. Ben Witticks.

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(***Publishing***—*continued from page 13)*

good business. It enhances the credibility of the Service's historical research program, and it announces to a wide audience that the bureau has a strong research program that maintains the highest standards of the profession. And finally, by embracing an activist stance toward peer review and publishing, NPS historians can minimize the potential of being labeled mere public relations agents for a government agency manufacturing its own version of history. (In his 1992 book *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century*, John Bodnar criticizes the Service for its promotion of a "public memory that served the cause of a powerful nation-state.")

The Park Service should take immediate steps to institutionalize the profession's standards and to require that all research reports be subjected to the peer review process. In addition, those same standards should require that all or a portion of every serious piece of research be published in a quarterly or press that employs the peer review process. There is a great deal of excellent scholarship being accomplished within the NPS. The producers of that work have the right to demonstrate that their work meets the academy's test of scholarship and is good enough to be added to the historical literature of the subject under consideration. Historical research worth pursuing is worth exposing to the widest possible review and readership.

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[1] George T. Mazuzen, "Government-Sponsored Research: A Sanitized Past?" *The Public Historian* 10 (Summer 1988): 35-40.